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Eastern Caribbean: Rising Cuban Influence

Basic trends in the economically troubled islands of the Eastern Caribbean--which contain about 2.5 million people in a land area smaller than the state of Connecticut--are eroding democratic traditions and opening up opportunities for a growth of Cuban influence. Havana is exploiting the economic and political instability and is making significant gains among an emerging generation of West Indian leaders that is generally sympathetic to Cuba's social achievements and is often wary of the United States and other Western countries, which are generally identified with the islands' "old guard." Five independent ministates have been established among the 11 mostly English-speaking countries in the region since 1962, and three more are expected to follow within the next year.

Since the early 1970s, the islands have been hard hit by increasing oil import costs, declining commodity export earnings, and a stagnation of foreign investment. Unemployment on most of the islands now afflicts 30 percent or more of the labor force and is much higher among the younger population. Rapid population growth, despite rising illegal emigration to the United States, aggravates the problem. The median age in the region is 16, and disaffected youth provide a broad base of support for pro-Cuban leftists. The economic downturn has also stepped up middle-class emigration, which is robbing moderate political groups of effective leadership.

Cuban and local leftists are making their greatest gains among the English-speaking islands, which are moving most rapidly to independence. All of the eight islands expected to be independent by the end of next year are former British colonies, and most are losing security assistance from the United Kingdom at a time when small, action-prone radical groups are achieving unprecedented political influence. The French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, and the Netherlands Antilles, which will probably become independent early in the 1980s, have

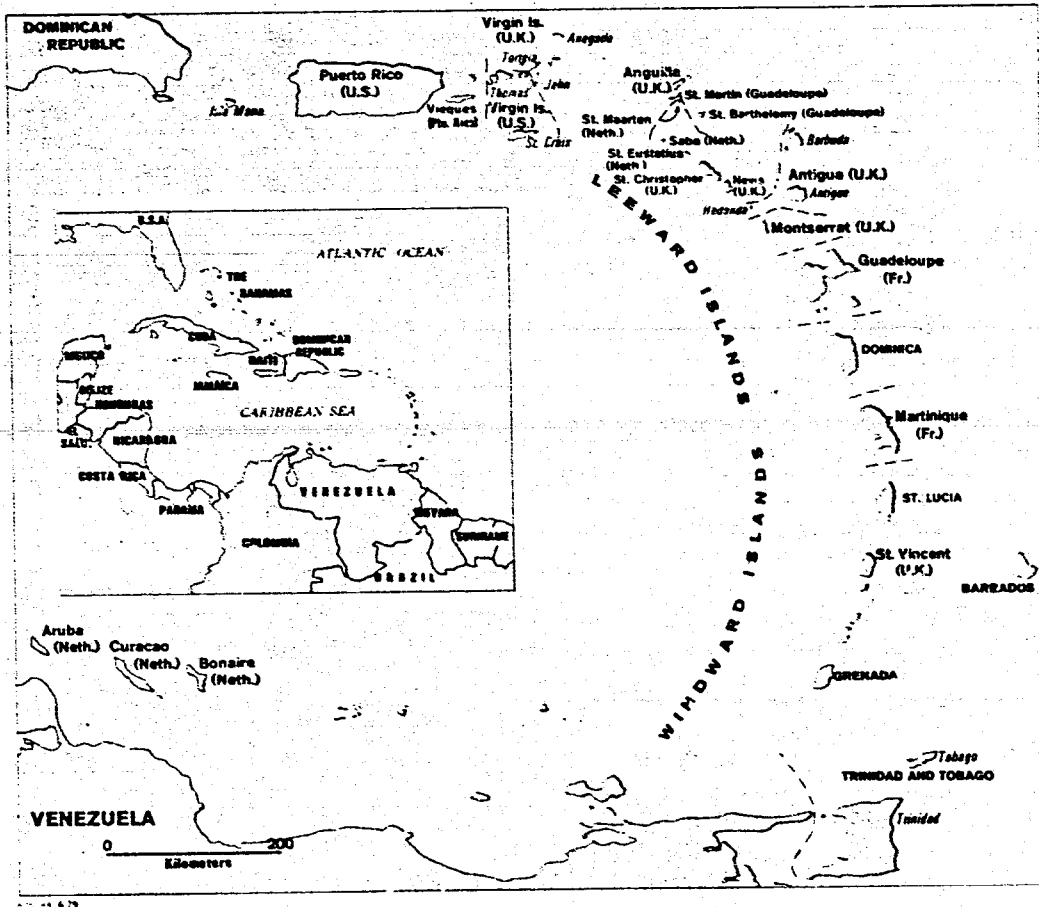
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powerful leftist parties but are more stable because they still receive large amounts of metropolitan economic aid and security assistance. [REDACTED]

#### Recent Changes in Government

The coup in Grenada on 13 March was the first unconstitutional seizure of power in the English-speaking Caribbean. Since then, rapid constitutional turnovers in three other islands--whose timing is coincidental--have greatly increased Cuban influence. The crisis in Dominica, when widespread demonstrations forced the government to resign last month after only seven months of independence, resulted from a longstanding conflict between a scandal-ridden government and conservative labor unions. The new Prime Minister, Oliver Seraphin, is a young political opportunist who has appointed to the Senate the leaders of the country's three previously peripheral leftist groups. [REDACTED]

The election early this month in Saint Lucia, independent only since February, was scheduled as required by the constitution. An electorate that had nearly doubled over the past five years because of an infusion of young voters removed a long-entrenched government that had become increasingly unpopular among moderate pressure groups. The new ruling party is dominated by pro-Cuban leftists led by Deputy Prime Minister George Odium, who is likely to become head of the government early in its five-year term. [REDACTED]

In Saint Kitts-Nevis, the death of Premier Southwell in May brought to power Lee Moore, a relatively young former black-power activist, who intends to achieve independence for his two-island country by next year and who probably will follow a nonaligned foreign policy favorable to Cuba even though he appears to be a moderate on economic policy and basically friendly toward the United States. [REDACTED]

In the Netherlands Antilles--which comprises three main islands off the coast of Venezuela and three smaller islands in the Eastern Caribbean--labor unrest earlier

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## New Caribbean Leaders



Deputy Prime Minister  
George Odium of St. Lucia



Interim Prime Minister  
Oliver Seraphin of Dominica



Premier Lee Moore  
of St. Kitts-Nevis



Prime Minister of Grenada Maurice Bishop,  
with his wife and two children

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this year forced the resignation of the moderate, pro-Western government. The leftist movement for a new Antilles won a plurality in the 6 July election and is expected to form a government sympathetic to Cuba but restrained by the strong local influence of the Netherlands, Venezuela, and the United States. The youthful leader of the movement, Don Martina, is a US-educated former black power advocate with a broad base of support among blacks on the largest island of Curacao. [REDACTED]

Except in strongly democratic Barbados, chances of instability are increasing elsewhere in the region. The government of Antigua, which also hopes to gain independence by next year, could be toppled because of a growing scandal involving the illegal transshipment of arms. The moderate opposition would likely win a near-term election, but a small pro-Cuban leftist group is making political headway. Trinidad and Tobago's oil-based economy has eased problems there and is gradually opening new employment opportunities, but the repressive 23-year rule of eccentric Prime Minister Williams has discouraged broadened political participation and increased chances of political instability in the long term. [REDACTED]

#### Cuban Activism

Cuba has moved quickly and effectively to exploit regional trends. Since 1976, Havana has made numerous offers of technical assistance to established governments and has courted local radical groups. In the past, Cuba has been treated coolly by the governments of Antigua, Saint Kitts-Nevis, and Barbados, and with mild hostility by Trinidad and Tobago. Cuban prospects have increased dramatically, however, because of the changes of government in Grenada, Dominica, Saint Lucia, and the Netherlands Antilles. [REDACTED]

Youth-oriented "Cuban friendship societies" that are active throughout the region are slowly building support for Havana. Cuba will transport youth delegations from several of the islands to a Caribbean festival in Cuba later this month. It also recently has assigned a high-level regional expert as Ambassador to Jamaica, presumably to coordinate Cuban policy in the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean. [REDACTED]

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The Cubans have invested most in Grenada and their efforts have paid off. Although he was committed to close relations with Cuba from the outset, Prime Minister Maurice Bishop is now heavily indebted to Havana for the reported shipment of enough rifles, revolvers, and light machineguns to equip up to 2,000 troops; an unknown quantity of heavy machineguns; and four antiaircraft guns. A 12-member Cuban medical team arrived early this month, joining at least 50 military personnel and a large number of Cuban technicians. Last week, the two countries signed a comprehensive two-year technical and economic assistance agreement. [REDACTED]

### Prospects

Severe economic problems probably will continue to erode democratic institutions and to open the region to political leaders offering new models of development. The new generation of leaders--many of whom were educated in North America and in the United Kingdom at the height of the black-power and antiwar movements--are strongly oriented toward a larger government role in their economies and are not drawn to parliamentary politics on the Westminster model. While continuing to seek Western aid, they will favor strong central governments that they believe are more capable of implementing far-reaching economic reforms. [REDACTED]

Nevertheless, in all the islands, new leaders will have to contend for the foreseeable future with the conservative influence of powerful trade unions, active opposition parties, the church, the private sector, and the relatively independent press. In small island societies, moreover, they also are likely to be influenced by moderate familial and old-boy ties that have traditionally submerged ideological considerations. [REDACTED]

Cuba and local leftists will continue to benefit from the rise of a new generation of West Indian nationalists and from the extreme social and economic problems it faces. Cuban influence is becoming increasingly legitimate because of Havana's active participation in the growing youth-dominated dialogue among regional labor, women's, youth, and press groups. This contrasts with the Western countries' identification with the Caribbean's fast disappearing old guard. [REDACTED]

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Regionally, the changes in government will broaden and intensify the ideological conflict started by the Grenada coup and will hurt US-backed initiatives promoting interisland cooperation in the security field. Last weekend, the new leaders of Saint Lucia and Dominica ended their predecessors' official hostility toward Grenada and met there for a tripartite "microsummit" on regional affairs. [REDACTED] a small Cuban delegation also participated. These new governments--with encouragement from Cuba--are likely to promote their own brand of regional cooperation that minimizes US political influence and overrides the conservative inclinations of old guard leaders in Antigua, Saint Vincent, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago. [REDACTED]

On the world scene, the continued increase in the number of independent nations in the Eastern Caribbean could present problems for international organizations such as the Organization of American States, in which the ministates will have disproportionate influence. The potential international role of the ministates is limited, however, by their sparse resources, by their desire for broad outside economic assistance, and by their historical tendency to act independently of one another. [REDACTED]

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